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FOR NEA, NEA/ARPI, AND NEA/PI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KMPI](#) [EAID](#) [BA](#) [REFORM](#) [REGION](#)

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN PLEASED WITH SUCCESS OF FORUM BUT FOCUS ON LACK OF DECLARATION DISAPPOINTING

REF: MANAMA 1679

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) The Ambassador called on MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow-Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz

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bin Mubarak Al Khalifa November 20 to discuss the November 11-12 Forum for the Future conference held in Manama. Shaikh Abdul Aziz, who was the lead Bahraini organizer, told the Ambassador that the conference had many successes, including the "historic participation" of NGOs in the proceedings. The Bahrain conference was an enormous improvement over the treatment of NGOs in Rabat, and he hopes this trend continues with the next conference in Amman. While some civil society representatives were not entirely happy with the Bahraini and British chairs' strict control of interventions during the conference, Shaikh Abdul Aziz pointed out that the GOB also supported the November 9-10 parallel conference for NGOs. This conference provided an additional outlet for activists to express their views.

2. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz said that at the closing press conference, Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid had announced King Hamad's decision to provide \$2 million in funding for the Fund for the Future and Foundation for the Future. Shaikh Abdul Aziz noted that the GOB had not yet decided on the breakdown of funding between the two institutions, but the split would probably not be even.

3. (C) Shaikh Abdul Aziz said the focus on the lack of a formal declaration at the conclusion of the conference was disappointing. He noted that the concept of a declaration was a relatively new development, having been discussed for the first time at the September 9 steering committee meeting in London. The first country to express concerns with the language in the draft declaration was Oman, on November 10, the eve of the opening of the Senior Officials meeting. Oman was worried about the perception of the declaration allowing interference in internal affairs. After negotiations between the Omani and British delegations, there was consensus on 80 percent of the text, enough that the Bahrainis felt comfortable moving ahead with the declaration. The Saudis offered some wordsmithing on use of the term "creed" in place of "religion," but these were not serious objections.

4. (C) Bahrain was surprised, however, when the Egyptians voiced objections "at the eleventh hour" over language on assistance to NGOs. Shaikh Abdul Aziz said he met with Egyptian MFA official Shaaban to discuss Egypt's insistence on referring to "legally registered" NGOs, and recommended Shaaban take it up with U.S. officials. Shaikh Abdul Aziz said he did not receive an update on the status of those talks, but it was clear they failed. He faulted Egypt for not accepting the declaration, which was not a legally binding document. He wondered, however, why the U.S. could not accept the reference to legally registered NGOs.

5. (C) Comment: Shaikh Abdul Aziz put the blame for the lack of a declaration squarely on Egypt. He was uncomfortable, however, with the international media's sensationalistic focus on the conference "ending in discord," and implied that King Hamad and others were concerned with the perception of the outcomes. While the conference did not issue a declaration, it did launch the Fund and Foundation for the Future, and some 44 civil society representatives sat at the table with governments as equals - an historic and unprecedented event in the region.

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